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Personnel



★PROFESSIONAL AND UNPROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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This instruction identifies command, supervisory and personal responsibilities for maintaining professional relationships between Air Force members, between Air Force members and the Air Force and Department of Defense civilian employee work force, and between Air Force members and members of other uniformed services. Unprofessional relationships, especially fraternization, erode good order, discipline, respect for authority, unit cohesion and, ultimately, mission accomplishment. It is the responsibility of commanders and supervisors at all levels to ensure compliance with this instruction. This instruction applies to all active duty members, members of the United States Air Force Reserve (USAFR), and members of the Air National Guard (ANG). Officers, including Reserve officers on active duty or inactive duty for training and ANG officers in Federal service, who violate the custom of the service against fraternization or the specific prohibitions contained in paragraph 5 and all of its subparagraphs can be prosecuted under either Article 92 or Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), or both, as well as any other applicable article of the UCMJ, when appropriate.

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS

This instruction has been revised throughout. Major revisions follow: provides additional guidance on activities and situations that lead to or constitute unprofessional relationships, including fraternization; prohibits officers from engaging in specific relationships with enlisted members; subjects officers who violate the specific prohibitions to disciplinary action under the UCMJ; provides expanded guidance on administrative actions which may be initiated as a result of unprofessional relationships; extends the instruction to cover relationships between military members and civilian employees; stresses personal accountability for maintaining and enforcing professional relationships; and requires commanders and supervisors to act expeditiously in addressing all forms of unprofessional relationships.

1. General. Professional relationships are essential to the effective operation of all organizations, both military and civilian, but the nature of the military mission requires absolute confidence in command and an unhesitating adherence to orders that may result in inconvenience, hardships or, at times, injury or death. This distinction makes the maintenance of professional relationships in the military more critical than in civilian organizations. While personal relationships between Air Force members are normally matters of individual choice and judgment, they become matters of official concern when they adversely affect the Air Force. This guidance focuses on the impact of personal relationships on the interests of the Air Force as an institution. The guidance set forth in this instruction is based, in part, on the custom against fraternization that has been a part of and enforced within the American military for over 200 years.

2. Guidance.

2.1. Professional Relationships. Professional relationships are those that contribute to the effective operation of the Air Force. The Air Force encourages personnel to communicate freely with their superiors regarding their careers, performance, duties and missions. This type of communication enhances morale and discipline and improves the operational environment while preserving proper respect for authority and appropriate mission focus. Participation by members of all grades in organizational activities, unit sponsored events, intramural sports, chapel activities, community welfare projects, youth programs and the like, enhances morale and contributes to unit cohesion.

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2.2. Unprofessional Relationships. Relationships are unprofessional, whether pursued on or off-duty, when they detract from the authority of superiors or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of, favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals for personal interests. Unprofessional relationships can exist between officers, between enlisted members, between officers and enlisted members, and between military personnel and members of the civilian employee work force. Fraternization is an aggravated form of unprofessional relationship and is recognized as a violation of Article 134 of the UCMJ.

2.2.1. Fraternization. Fraternization is a personal relationship between an officer and an enlisted member which violates the customary bounds of acceptable behavior in the Air Force and prejudices good order and discipline, discredits the armed services, or operates to the personal disgrace or dishonor of the officer involved. The custom recognizes that officers will not form personal relationships with enlisted members on terms of military equality, whether on or off-duty. Although the custom originated in an all male military, it is gender neutral. Fraternization can occur between males, between females and between males and females. Because of the potential damage fraternization can do to good order, discipline, morale, and unit cohesion, the President specifically provided for the offense of fraternization under the UCMJ. Consequently, disciplinary action can be initiated under the UCMJ against an officer for fraternization. (See Manual for Courts-Martial, 1984, Part IV, Paragraphs 59 and 83 for a complete discussion of fraternization and the related offense of conduct unbecoming an officer.)

3. General Guidelines for all Military Personnel for Avoiding Unprofessional Relationships, Including Fraternization. Military experience has shown that certain kinds of personal relationships present a high risk for being or developing into unprofessional relationships. Unprofessional relationships negatively impact morale and discipline. While some personal relationships are not in and of themselves unprofessional, they may be or become unprofessional when other facts or circumstances are taken into consideration. For example, factors which can change an otherwise permissible relationship into an unprofessional relationship include the members' relative positions in the organization, and the members' relative positions in the supervisory and command chains. Air Force members, both officer and enlisted, must be sensitive to the formation of those relationships and consider the probable impact of their actions on the Air Force in making their decisions. The rules regarding these relationships must be somewhat elastic to accommodate differing conditions; however, the underlying standard is that Air Force members are expected to avoid those relationships that negatively affect morale and discipline. Where economic constraints or operational requirements place officers and enlisted members and

members of different grades in close proximity with one another (such as combined or joint clubs, joint recreational facilities or mixed officer/enlisted housing areas) military members are, nevertheless, expected to maintain professional relationships. The mere fact that maintaining professional relationships may be more difficult under certain circumstances does not excuse a member's responsibility to maintain Air Force standards.

3.1. Relationships Within an Organization. Unduly familiar relationships between members in which one member exercises supervisory or command authority over the other can easily be or become unprofessional. Similarly, as differences in grades increase, even in the absence of a command or supervisory relationship, there may be more risk that the relationship will be, or be perceived to be unprofessional because senior members in military organizations normally exercise authority or some direct or indirect organizational influence over more junior members. The danger for abuse of authority is always present. The ability of the senior member to influence, directly or indirectly, assignments, promotion recommendations, duties, awards, and other privileges and benefits, places both the senior member and the junior member in a vulnerable position. Once established, such relationships do not go unnoticed by other members of a unit. Unprofessional relationships, including fraternization, between members of different services, particularly in joint service operations, may have the same impact on morale and discipline as if the members were assigned to the same service and should be avoided.

3.2. Relationships With Civilian Employees. Civilians are an integral part of the Air Force. They contribute directly to readiness and mission accomplishment. Consequently, military supervisors of all grades must maintain professional relationships with civilian employees. Unprofessional relationships with civilian employees, particularly those whom they supervise can have an adverse affect on morale, discipline and respect for authority.

3.3. Dating and Close Friendships. Dating, courtship, and close friendships between men and women are subject to the same policy considerations as are other relationships. Like any personal relationship, they become a matter of official concern when they adversely affect morale, discipline, unit cohesion, respect for authority, or mission accomplishment. Members must recognize that these relationships can adversely affect morale and discipline even when the members are not in the same chain of command or unit. The formation of these relationships between superiors and subordinates within the same chain of command or supervision invariably raises the perception of favoritism or misuse of position and impacts morale and discipline negatively.

3.4. Shared Activities. Sharing living accommodations, vacations, transportation, and off-duty interests on a frequent or recurring basis can be, or can reasonably be perceived to be, unprofessional. These types of arrange-

ments often lead to claims of abuse of position or favoritism. It is often the frequency of these activities or the absence of any official purpose or organizational benefit which causes them to become, or to be perceived to be, unprofessional. While an occasional round of golf, game of racquetball or similar activity between a supervisor and a subordinate could remain professional, daily or weekly activities could result in at least the perception of an unprofessional relationship. Similarly, while it might be appropriate for a first sergeant to play golf with a different group of officers from his organization each weekend, in order to get to know them better, playing with the same officers every weekend might be, or be perceived to be, unprofessional.

3.5. Training, Schools and Professional Military Education. Personal relationships between students and instructors or staff in the training and school environment present particular risks and are especially likely to result in abuse of position, partiality or favoritism by instructors or staff, or create the appearance of such. Consequently, additional, specially tailored rules may be needed in this environment. Commands providing these functions should, consistent with this instruction, publish supplemental directives to regulate personal relationships in the training and school environment.

3.6. Other Relationships. Other relationships, not specifically addressed above, can, depending on the circumstances, lead to actual or perceived favoritism or preferential treatment and must be avoided. Examples of activities which may result, depending on the circumstances in an adverse impact on morale, discipline and respect for authority are gambling, partying with subordinates, soliciting or making solicited sales to members junior in rank, grade or position (with specific exceptions as set out in DoD 5500-7.R, *Joint Ethics Regulation*, paragraph 5-409), and joint business ventures.

4. Consequences of Unprofessional Conduct. All military members are subject to lawful orders. When a military member has been lawfully ordered to cease an unprofessional relationship or refrain from certain conduct, the military member is subject to prosecution under the UCMJ for violation of the order. Similarly, all military members are subject to prosecution for criminal offenses committed incidental to an unprofessional relationship (e.g. gambling, adultery, assault). In addition, officers may be prosecuted for violation of the specific prohibitions listed in paragraph 5 and all of its subparagraphs; violation of the custom against fraternization; and conduct unbecoming an officer.

5. Specific Prohibitions Relating to Officers (Fraternization). Unprofessional relationships between officers and enlisted members have a high potential for damaging morale and discipline and for compromising the standing of officers. Consequently, officers have an ethical and a legal obligation to avoid certain relationships and

activities. Officers must not engage in any activity with an enlisted member that reasonably may prejudice good order and discipline, discredit the armed forces or compromise an officer's standing. The custom against fraternization in the Air Force extends beyond organizational and chain of command lines. In short, it extends to all officer/enlisted relationships.

5.1. Specific Prohibitions. Conduct which violates the custom of the Air Force against fraternization can be prosecuted under Article 134 of the UCMJ. In addition, with reasonable accommodation of married members and members related by blood or marriage, the following conduct is prohibited and can be prosecuted under either Article 92 of the UCMJ, Article 134, or both, and any other applicable article of the UCMJ when appropriate:

5.1.1. Officers will not gamble with enlisted members.

5.1.2. Officers will not borrow money from or otherwise become indebted to enlisted members.

5.1.3. Officers Will Not Engage in Sexual Relations With or Date Enlisted Members. Dating as set out here includes not only traditional, prearranged, social engagements between two members, but also includes more contemporary social activities which would reasonably be perceived to be a substitute for traditional dating.

5.1.3.1. Officer/Enlisted Marriages. Officer/enlisted marriages are not always the result of fraternization. Some are created by commissioning civilians married to enlisted members; others by commissioning an enlisted member married to another enlisted member. A small number of these marriages occur by operation of law following force reductions and nonselection for promotion of some officers with prior enlisted service. Consequently, the fact that an officer is married to an enlisted member is not, by itself, evidence of misconduct. When evidence of fraternization exists, however, the fact that the officer and enlisted member subsequently marry does not preclude appropriate command action based on the prior fraternization. Regardless of how the marriage came to be, married members are expected to respect all customs and courtesies observed by members of different grades when they are on duty or in uniform in public.

5.1.4. Officers Will Not Share Living Accommodations With Enlisted Members. This prohibition does not extend to situations where military operations reasonably require the sharing of living accommodations.

6. Individual Responsibility To Maintain Professional Relationships. All military members share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships. However, the senior member (officer or enlisted) in a personal relationship bears primary responsibility for maintaining the professionalism of that relationship. Leadership requires the maturity and judgment to avoid relationships which undermine respect for authority or which reasonably may impact negatively on morale, discipline, respect for authority, or the mission of the Air Force. This is especially true of officers and noncommissioned officers who are

expected to exhibit the highest standards of professional conduct and to lead by example. The senior member in a relationship is in the best position to appreciate the effect of that particular relationship on an organization and in the best position to terminate or limit the extent of the relationship. Members should expect to be and must be held accountable for the impact of their conduct on the Air Force as an institution.

7. Command and Supervisory Responsibilities. Commanders and supervisors at all levels have the authority and the responsibility to maintain good order, discipline and morale within their units. They may be held accountable for failing to act in appropriate cases.

8. Actions in Response to Unprofessional Relationships. If good professional judgment and common sense indicate that a relationship is causing, or may reasonably result in, a degradation of morale, good order, or discipline, corrective action is required. Action should normally be the least severe necessary to correct the relationship, giving full consideration to the impact the relationship has had on the organization. Counseling, alone, or in conjunction with other options, may be an appropriate first step. Where a relationship continues in spite of counseling or other administrative action, an order to cease the relationship, or the offensive portion of the relationship, can and should be given. Officers or enlisted members who violate such orders are subject to action under the UCMJ for the violation of an order. Corrective action in different cases need not be identical, but should be measured in terms of the nature of the violation and the severity of its impact on morale, discipline, unit cohesion or the mission. Appear-

ances of favoritism or partiality caused by inexperience or inadvertence are normally less serious than those resulting from a knowing disregard for policy or misuse of position or office. Instances of actual favoritism, partiality, or misuse of grade or position may constitute violations of the UCMJ and, in appropriate cases, should result in punitive action. Relationships which have had an adverse impact on the Air Force should not be excused simply because the members subsequently marry or one of the members leaves the service. Where action under the UCMJ is determined not to be appropriate, the full spectrum of administrative actions is available. Administrative actions include, but are not limited to, counseling, reprimand, creation of an unfavorable information file, removal from position or assignment, demotion, delay or removal from a promotion list, adverse comment in performance reports and processing for administrative separation. One or more administrative actions may be appropriate.

9. Training. Instruction on the concepts of unprofessional relationships and fraternization shall be made a part of the curricula for basic training, commissioning programs, and professional military education for all military personnel. Commanders will familiarize themselves with this instruction and make certain all personnel are briefed on the concepts on an annual basis or more frequently as required.

10. Questions Regarding This Instruction. Military members who have questions as to the application or interpretation of this instruction should consult their commander. Commanders are encouraged to consult their servicing staff judge advocate for assistance in interpretation.

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